

The Noble Nagarjuna, Logic and Non-Duality

Peter G Jones

Not from self, not from other,
Not from both, not without cause:
Things do not arise
At any place, at any time.

Nagarjuna
Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way

This discussion examines some of the metaphysical claims of the Perennial philosophy and explores their significance and the immediacy of their implications for modern scholastic philosophy and natural science. It may reveal the metaphysical simplicity of the world described by the mystics. The idea is not to explain or justify mysticism and the discussion need not be entirely understood for the conveyance of its message. It is an attempt to hastily sketch-out and clarify the logical relationship between the non-dual teachings of the masters and sages of the Perennial tradition and the formal metaphysics of Plato, Kant, Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Chalmers and the 'Academy', the stereotypically 'Western' approach to metaphysics shared by the Romanised form of speculative Christianity and most Muslims and Jews, the majority of the world's working scientists, probably most other people and more than likely the reader. It may also shed light on the inseparable connection between the formal metaphysics of the Perennial philosophy as described by the Buddha, Lao Tsu, Plotinus, Bradley, George Spencer Brown, Sadhguru and Rupert Spira, say, and its experience-dependent psychological and soteriological teachings.

Even in this internet age the amateur philosopher immersed in a traditional 'Western' way of thinking will find the study of 'mysticism' and the 'Perennial' philosophy a significant challenge. It will certainly not be obvious where to start. The considerable amount of nonsense written about this mysterious world-view and metaphysical doctrine will at first be indistinguishable from the trustworthy stuff and, in any case, the authentic literature claims of itself that a meaningful understanding would be impossible without some degree of realisation acquired in the silence of what Schopenhauer calls his 'better' consciousness, which might seem to suggest that for a non-practicing scholar or interested layman there would be no point in starting. Approximately none of this literature is designed to bridge the explanatory gap between the Upanishads, the Buddhist *sutras* and *Tao Teh Ching*, say, and our modern formal academic metaphysics let alone the thoughts of the average layman. What there is of it is for the most part written from the academic side and too often serves to make the Perennial philosophy appear irrelevant, unscientific, paradoxical or so complex as to be incomprehensible to all but great scholars.

This is unfortunate because what the mystics tell us about metaphysics is simple, rigorous, systematic, well-tested and immediately relevant to everyone. If we are starting out with an interested layman's knowledge of metaphysics then even this may allow an understanding the metaphysics of the Buddha and Lao Tsu sufficient for a judgement of its plausibility and rationality as a theory. This would not

demand great scholarship. The level of understanding required for assessing the plausibility of their metaphysical claims is minimal because unlike the practitioner a scholar is concerned with analysis and not with true understanding. In metaphysics we are not attempting to understand the claims of the mystics but trying to identify them, test them and determine whether it would be worth our while trying to understand them. Reaching an understanding might take a lot of work so it would be sensible before setting out to subject them to our usual tests of reason and rationality.

The work of the revered second-century Buddhist monk Noble Nagarjuna may be critical to any scholarly study or intellectual understanding of metaphysics and mysticism and we examine it here. In his *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way* Nagarjuna clarifies the logical relationship between Russell's 'Rational' or 'Western' philosophy and that of the Buddha and Lao Tsu, allowing us to unify philosophy and see it as a whole.

An authoritative description of world according to the 'Perennial' philosophy as defined for this discussion may be found in *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* edited by David Godman. ('Maharshi' translates from Sanskrit as 'great seer'. 'Sri' is an honorific.) Sri Ramana died in 1950 at which time he was widely considered India's most Holy living master, where 'Holy' would imply 'Whole'. His preferred method was to teach in silence but with those unable to benefit he talked with patience, eloquence, economy and, when he felt able, unflinching rigour. This proviso 'when he felt able' in respect of rigour must be added for reasons that when examined reveal the reason why no intractable metaphysical problems arise for the Perennial philosophy and thus why it represents such a real, immediate and head-on challenge to the world-view presently prevailing in our Western universities and societies. A remark made by the editor during his introduction illustrates the importance of Nagarjuna to modern Western philosophy. The editor explains that Sri Ramana would sometimes say contradictory things to those who would be unable to understand a rigorous answer to their questions.

He might, for example, tell one person that the individual self is non-existent and then turn to another person and give a detailed description of how the individual self functions, accumulates karma and reincarnates.

Contradictoriness is a world-famous feature of the Perennial teachings. Such seemingly-contradictory comments made by a teacher who claims certain knowledge of 'what is the case' may appear to undermine his case but this is a matter of appearance. It is one of the easiest misunderstandings of the non-dual teachings of mysticism to see them as logically contradictory. Yet ever careful with his words the ancient master Lao Tsu tells us 'True words seem paradoxical', and this would only be worth saying if they are not actually so.

The difficulty of explaining why true words seem paradoxical while not actually being so is such that it will often be sensible to avoid saying seemingly-opposite things in the same sentence to someone who would not understand this use of language. It is sometimes better to be helpful than rigorous and this is well understood within the Perennial tradition. The problem is only that if we do not understand the reason for this blatant contradictoriness then the literature of mysticism will appear to be an impenetrable jumble of incoherent world-views instead of an ever-evolving harmonious symphony of rigorous statements and helpful approximations.

So how, if the self is non-existent as mysticism teaches, can it function? In *Fundamental Verses* Nagarjuna demonstrates that for a logically defensible fundamental theory *everything* that functions must be non-existent. All other views are shown to be logically indefensible. By the use of a series of Aristotelian *reductio* arguments he exhaustively demonstrates the failure in ordinary logic of all positive, partial, selective or extreme metaphysical positions to leave standing only his own, the neutral metaphysical position or 'Middle Way' endorsed by the Perennial philosophy. The proposition

‘Something exists’ would be a paradigm example of a positive, extreme, partial and demonstrably absurd position and this, together with the proposition ‘Nothing exists’, may have been his primary target for refutation.

This analytical result is explained by his *theory of emptiness* and ‘Doctrine of Two Truths’ or ‘Worlds’. He does not alter the Buddha’s teachings by a jot but systematises and explains them in formal metaphysics, by so doing performing a great service not just for his monks but for all future rational philosophers. That a great master would come along to perform this service is said to have been predicted by the Buddha. Predicted or not Nagarjuna precisely specifies and cements in place the philosophical foundation of ‘Middle Way’ Buddhism (thus Zen) and demonstrates its unfalsifiability in logic. In this way he establishes the correct philosophical interpretation of the *sutras* or, at least, the only one that works in logic.

Nagarjuna’s work is of inestimable value to non-practitioners attempting to pin-down the philosophical basis of the non-dual philosophy. Reading the Buddhist *sutras* would certainly be a hopeless method if unsupported by practical work. Nagarjuna makes it an easy task by carefully demonstrating that mysticism is not a positive metaphysical position. Because there is only one other reasonable metaphysical position this negative definition of the Buddha’s ‘position’, if we may call it this, is precise and exact. The only alternative to a positive or partial position is a doctrine of Unity. In metaphysics this requires a neutral metaphysical theory for which all positive theories are false and thus logically absurd. This explains Lao Tsu’s aphorism about true words and also why the Buddha would not be drawn on metaphysical questions. ‘True words’ is sometimes translated as ‘Words that are rigorous’. These are difficult to speak and likely to be confusing because they require a language of contradictory complementarity.

For Nagarjuna the seemingly-contradictory words of Sri Ramana quoted earlier would be an example of someone speaking initially from an ‘Ultimate’ perspective and subsequently from a ‘Conventional’ perspective. The former’s doctrine of ‘Two Worlds’ or ‘Truths’ explains that Reality is ‘non-dual’ thus just as Sri Ramana describes. There would always be two ways of looking at it. We might see it as One or Many, Subject or Object, Extended or not-Extended, Somewhere or Nowhere, Sacred or Mundane, Big or Small, Existent or non-Existent and so on. In our Conventional world we carry on as if the distinction ‘exist/not-exist’ is fundamental and for day to day survival we might as well do this. Yet by reduction or for an Ultimate analysis of Reality this distinction would have to be transcended for Unity. Thus there would be two opposing Truths, both of which must be taken into account when considering or presenting a fundamental or global view. Thus for rigorous speech we must use a language that appears to be paradoxical. The self exists conventionally and functions, and indeed this may be the entire problem for the practitioner, but a profound realisation or careful analysis will reveal it to be a fiction.

Lao Tsu tells us *Tao* cannot be spoken and must be spoken. He was not being ‘illogical’. He distinguishes between the conventional and ultimate worlds and, as we are obliged to do in metaphysics, takes both into account. We must refer to both members of the Ultimate’s infinite pairs of contradictory and complementary aspects when we speak of the world-as-a-whole, by so doing pointing beyond these aspects to that which they are dualistic-aspects *of*, the unsayable pristine Unity beyond the categories of thought.

This idea takes us beyond reach of thought and is decidedly ‘mystical’. Such a dual-aspect situation, were it to be the case, would require a language of contradictory complementarity within which true words will seem paradoxical to most people. Tao cannot be said or conceived as what it is but we may talk and think about its contradictory appearances and conceptual aspects. The language of quantum theory has similarities caused by the same underlying dual-aspect problem. Nagarjuna demonstrates that it would be perverse to believe that these dual-aspects are fundamental but reasonable to believe Reality is a Unity and thus ‘non-dual’. A meaningful understanding of what the mystics say about

metaphysics will therefore depend on some comprehension of what the phrase 'non-dual' means when used to describe Reality. Without this we will be unable to make sense of their language and will misunderstand the term 'Unity'. Nagarjuna demonstrates that all positive metaphysical theories are logically absurd but even Russell and Carnap could work this out and it is only the beginning of the Perennial philosophy, which only begins in earnest when we ask what this result of analysis means. It is over the interpretation of this result that Western scholastic philosophy and the Perennial philosophy disagrees, not over whether it is a result.

Understanding the neutral theory that uniquely survives Nagarjuna's analytical onslaught on metaphysical conjectures is a famously difficult task yet establishing it is a neutral theory requires no more than a knowledge of his simple result. This may be stated as *All positive metaphysical positions are logically indefensible*. This result is neither controversial nor surprising. Most philosophers arrive at it and it is the reason why metaphysics is difficult. The importance of this result for scholastic philosophy lies in what Nagarjuna's painstaking effort to demonstrate it tells us about the Buddha's teachings, which is that they accord with logic and do not endorse a positive metaphysical theory. Nagarjuna shows that they represents an intellectually plausible solution for all metaphysical dilemmas. His proof establishes that his 'Middle Way' solution is irrefutable while reducing to absurdity every theory considered legitimate and worthy of study by the typical Western university philosophy department.

When we attempt to conceive or describe Reality or the world-as-a-whole it will necessarily seem to have contradictory and complementary aspects because we must assign objects-of-thought dual-aspects in order to conceive or describe them in the first place. We must employ dualistic set-theoretic categories-of-thought in order to think and a dualistic subject-predicate system of language in order to speak. Thus we cannot conceive, think or speak of the world-as-a-whole. So far we are retracing Kant's journey for he was hot on the trail of mysticism, but where is the rational metaphysician to go from here? How are we to understand Nagarjuna's philosophy? Can we think beyond Kant or even beyond thought?

For the Perennial philosophy the 'world-as-a-whole' would not be an undiscussable idea, empty phrase or unknowable speculation. It would be Consciousness in all its phases and hypostases thus accessible to all. This explains how Lao Tsu could learn so much about the world by sitting in a hut in the woods. This philosophy is grounded in a large collection of first-person (or 'no-person') reports. It teaches that we cannot think or imagine who we are but must realise or become this. Only then will we know what we mean when we use the phrase 'world-as-a-whole' and only then will we know not only that partial metaphysical positions are logically indefensible but also that they are untrue. It teaches that where it is dispassionate and honest human reason and logical analysis should be trusted and valued as guides to truth, but that knowledge and understanding requires that we inform our speculative theories with observations and realisations and put some flesh on the bones for any hope of understanding the world. The world would be far stranger than any mere theoretician could think or imagine. In Buddhism logical analysis would come under the heading of contemplation and is encouraged but its limits are recognised. The belief that we might one day build a Tower of Logic all the way up to Heaven is famous for creating an unholy babble of conflicting ideas and languages that renders philosophy incomprehensible and leaves us free to believe almost any old thing. Reality becomes comprehensible only when we discover, assume or at least suspend disbelief that Nagarjuna and Lao Tsu describe it correctly, for otherwise our world-view will demonstrably contradict logic and confuse us. The mystics axiomatise the world on a Unity transcending the categories required by the intellect, set theory and the functioning of Aristotle's 'laws of thought' and so share a common language and understanding.

Nagarjuna proves by abduction or 'inference to the best explanation' that the final truth is Unity. As this cannot be captured in language or thought we must cultivate a way of thinking in metaphysics

that depends on contradictory half-truths and employ a language that reflects this. His formalisation of this dual-aspect approach to organising our philosophical thoughts is the Doctrine of Two Truths. The ability to think and speak in terms of his two aspects of Reality would be necessary for a student of the metaphysical scheme of Perennial philosophy. If we are unable to do this then it is because we are not understanding the term 'Unity' in the correct way. Nagarjuna's writings on *emptiness* help us see that although our psycho-physical world reduces to non-existence it would be incorrect to say it does not exist. True words must take into account that which lies beyond the Existence/non-Existence distinction and is its source.

Only if Nagarjuna describes Reality correctly would Lao Tsu's paradoxical remark about true words be true and so a study of the latter helps us to understand the *Tao Te Ching* and generally the necessity in philosophy for a language of contradictory complementarity. His metaphysical explanation of the *sutras*, (he would say of 'what is the case'), unlocks the meaning of Sri Ramana's seemingly-contradictory words on the self and allows us to see that while the language and teachings of the Perennial philosophy may appear paradoxical they are not actually so. Were they paradoxical nobody would be able to understand them.

Long ago the Greek philosopher Diogenes Laertes reported, 'As to the Gymnosophists and Druids we are told that they uttered their philosophy in riddles'. It is surely not a coincidence that this third-century philosopher noted for his history of Greek philosophy was unable to understand their riddles any better than the twentieth-century Russell, noted for his later history of Western philosophy. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger assigns responsibility for the loss of the idea of Unity from Western thought to the early Greek philosophers. Thanks to the ravages of time Diogenes Laertes is today our most important extant source of information on early Greek thought but he is not considered reliable so perhaps it was not all their fault. Whatever the reason it was lost. With it went all understanding of the language of the Gymnosophists and Druids. Since that time not one global or fundamental theory has been proposed in Western metaphysics. This is because if a theory does not reduce the world to Unity then it is either non-reductive or logically indefensible, incomplete or unsystematic.

By his painstaking analysis Nagarjuna gives interested but non-practicing students of philosophy the tools to calculate how the Buddha's cosmological doctrine translates into a formal metaphysics of the academic kind and what it would imply more generally for higher-level philosophy, psychology, consciousness studies, physics and most importantly ourselves and our everyday lives. If we perform these calculations we may come to understand the reason for the language of the Gymnosophists and Druids, if not the full meaning. At least the blatant use of a seemingly-paradoxical language makes it quite easy to verify the global unity of the Perennial philosophy.

The reason why true words seem paradoxical and why Lao Tsu feels no need to add a proviso is that positive (and negative) statements about the world will always be true at one level of analysis and false at the other. 'We are and are-not' says Heraclitus, taking the world-as-a-whole into account. This is not a mysterious statement but simple and rigorous. In ordinary life we exist, obviously, for we 'stand out', but by reduction we do not for there can be nothing from which the world-as-a-whole stands out. For the Perennial philosophy all that seems to exist would do so only in dependence on the Real or Ultimate from which it derives its reality. Hence this world-view might be described as a form of global or absolute epiphenomenalism.

Russell notes that when phrased in logical form our everyday sentences usually implicitly begin, 'There is an x such that...'. Thus for Lao Tsu even the statement 'It is raining' would be unrigorous.

It reifies the rain and the entire phenomenal universe. For rigour in metaphysics we would have to say, (when it seems to be raining), that it rains and rains-not depending on what sort of conversation we are having. The self would not really exist yet it functions along with the weather and everything else that functions. What is Real would be beyond function, albeit we might say it has a function from some point of view. Lao Tsu tells us the laws of Heaven and Earth follow inevitably, 'Tao being what it is'.

Even if we are otherwise unacquainted with the non-dual philosophy just as long as we know that Nagarjuna's logical result is that all positive metaphysical theories give rise to fatal contradictions then we may know as much as would be necessary in order to judge for ourselves whether Buddhist teachings might be relevant to our own investigation of philosophy. There is no complexity in our situation. Nagarjuna's logical argument leaves us three options. The first would be to demonstrate the failure of his proof. So far this has proved impossible and in any case most philosophers reach the same result, albeit usually piecemeal. The second would be to reject his philosophy and settle for an incomprehensible metaphysics. This is a popular choice and open to everyone. The third would be to endorse his world-view or at least concede its plausibility subject to further investigation. There is no fourth option. Either we investigate Nagarjuna's view or we cannot hope to understand metaphysics.

Nagarjuna solves metaphysical dilemmas by way of a form of global or absolute compatibilism. Solipsism would be not-exactly true or false for it cannot be defined so as to be exactly true or false. This would be why we cannot prove otherwise. The self would exist and not-exist so while it seems to exist it cannot be found. Freewill would seem to be ours but its existence would be inconsistent with analysis and undemonstrable. Existence itself would exist and not-exist depending on the nature of the conversation and the definitions we use. By conceding that the ultimate truth of these phenomena is beyond conceptualisation and the categories of thought we have solved all metaphysical problems. This is the elegant simplicity of Nagarjuna's explanation for our inability to decide metaphysical problems in logic. It would be because they are undecidable! Doh! Nagarjuna asks us to have confidence in our own powers of reasoning and move on to examining what this inarguable result means.

Metaphysics becomes a little easier now. If someone were to ask us for a solution for the Mind-Body relationship and we reply it would be to deny the fundamental distinction embodied in the question then we will have given them the correct answer according to Nagarjuna and the Perennial philosophy and nobody will be able to falsify it. The same reply may be given for all such questions. It is therefore easy to memorise the Buddha's solution for metaphysical problems even if understanding it is a different matter. Many philosophers endorse some form of compatibilism in respect of Freewill-Determinism and a doctrine of Unity asks us to do this for all such problems. Hence the term 'Middle Way'. The term *advaita* in Indian religion embodies this rejection of extremes by the way it carefully denies the extremes of One-Many and One-Two, placing the Ultimate Origin beyond distinction, division, form and number. Nagarjuna shows that whatever we say about metaphysics it cannot be refuted if it rigorously endorses non-dualism and Unity. The downside is that people will think we are speaking in riddles.

By making explicit the metaphysical scheme of Buddhism and the Perennial philosophy or, at least, the scheme upon which this philosophy normalises, Nagarjuna gives scholastic philosophers an opportunity to understand and test its teachings with no need to sit silently in a cave for fifty years or even to read the literature. No great expertise would be required and most of the necessary ideas are mentioned in this essay. With no knowledge of Nagarjuna and, so it seems, no 'non-ordinary' experience to guide him, Kant almost arrived here. He just did the sums as we all might. For Nagarjuna the antinomies of Kant would be category-errors doomed to eternal undecidability for offering us a choice between two incorrect and incoherent theoretical possibilities. Kant dubbed Scepticism the 'scandal of philosophy', the foundational problem for the academic philosopher,

because its unfalsifiability is a fact that cannot be denied. Why deny it? For Nagarjuna Scepticism and Solipsism would be true or false depending on our formulation of the idea, the depth of our analysis and the nature of the conversation. Solipsism would be a non-issue since for a fundamental view experiences must be reduced along with the experienced-experiencer duality. The Perennial philosophy does not reify experiences or regard having them as a proof of their metaphysical reality. Rather, the experiencer, the experienced and the experience are reduced to that on which this trinity of terms are dependent. There would be sense in which all experiences are untrue.

For the Perennial philosophy Reality, as a Unity, would require the *principle of nonduality* for its description and a language of contradictory complementarity. The self would be non-existent along with all that seems to exist. The upper-case Self would be the source of all lower-case selves and this would be the reason why, with practice, it would be possible for us to realise this. This realisation would require no prior knowledge of metaphysics, (praise the Lord), yet it would be an important discipline. Nagarjuna judged it would help his monks in their practice if they understood how to avoid common intellectual errors and assist the *sangha* as a whole if it had a theoretical method for correcting heterodox theoretical views arising among communities of practitioners. If, when we do metaphysics, we never argue with the results of logic but naively accept them as we go along whenever we are sure of them, then we will find our philosophy lining up with that of the Buddha and Lao Tzu. If we refuse to concede the failure in logic of partial theories then we must endorse a logically absurd theory or none at all. For this reason there are two well-established and utterly distinct global traditions of philosophical thought, one of which endorses an unfalsifiable explanation for metaphysics and the other the theory that metaphysics is inexplicable and incomprehensible.

There are long, difficult and scholarly discussions of Nagarjuna but they would be unnecessary to us if we prefer to get straight to the point and might represent a significant obstacle to our doing so. Nagarjuna's logical result is, to put it bluntly, that nothing really exists or ever really happens. This statement is rigorous because of the proviso 'really'. Speaking conventionally, as we would for convenience in everyday life or for a naively-real world-view, things exist independently and the lower-case self may be said to function, accumulate karma and reincarnate. The laws of karma and physics would rule in this conventional world which would be entirely law-governed. Meanwhile, for an ultimate or fundamental analysis and in the immediate knowledge of Sri Ramana and those of his kind the manifesting phenomena of this space-time world would not exist inherently and even the self would be non-existent. The self of the egoistic distinct individual would function only while its non-existence has not been realised and the illusion is maintained. It would be a case of transference, projection and mistaken identity. The cure would be to 'Know Thyself' as the Oracle advises.

Nagarjuna does not demonstrate 'nothing exists' or 'something exists'. He proves, rather, that Reality as a Whole cannot be described so one-handedly. The familiar and deceptively simple Zen koan about the sound of one hand-clapping brings us to this issue when considered deeply. He explains that Existence is not what we usually think it is. He asks us to consider what we mean by 'Existence' and to wonder why we have such difficulty in explaining how it arises from non-Existence. He explains that all such problems arise from category-errors and are formally undecidable as a consequence. Our incomprehension when faced with metaphysical questions would not be caused by our inability to think clearly but by the nature of Reality. Kant asks why we continually have to retrace our steps in metaphysics but we do not have to do this if we do the sums accurately. Our difficulty arises from an incorrect interpretation of our results, not from calculation errors, and it cannot and need not be overcome by becoming an unusually clever-thinker but requires just a paradigm shift in our response to what for philosophers are the well-established and well-known results of analysis. For his response to the undecidability of metaphysical problems Carnap opted for logical positivism but his analysis would have allowed him to just as easily opt for Nagarjuna's solution had he known of it. Russell stated that there is no knowledge to be acquired in metaphysics precisely because he had already acquired all the knowledge he needed in order to solve it. He just did not want to believe this and

refused to study mysticism. Nagarjuna proposes that philosophers have no need to decide these antinomies and dilemmas, a task they know from the start is impossible, but only to learn from them.

Nagarjuna builds a sound rampart and half of a solid bridge-of-understanding to span the gulf of incomprehension dividing modern academic philosophy from that of Plotinus, Lao Tsu and Ramana Maharshi. He demonstrates that the teachings of mysticism are not contrary to logic and clearly describes their metaphysical foundation. His double-aspect theory might seem to imply a fundamental division in the world but there would be no true contradictions and this is what he proves. His employment of the 'Two Worlds' or 'Truths' doctrine will be misleading if it is seen as more than a didactic, conceptual or linguistic device. He proves that for a fundamental analysis there are not two worlds or truths but, rather, that this dualism would be a practical strategy for thinking or talking about Reality, the best our intellect and language can do and the most useful in philosophy. We would have to use the 'Two Worlds' method precisely because there are not two worlds. If we use it as a tool for understanding then it has the potential to reconcile a perennial metaphysics grounded in the Unity of All for which no intractable problems of philosophy arise with the dualistic metaphysics of the West that is incomprehensible to everyone, allowing us to escape from the stagnation and despair of the latter without having to abandon metaphysics and become a monk.

For the Perennial philosophy the ancient riddles of Western metaphysics - Kant's antinomies, Russell's 'problems of philosophy', Chalmers' 'hard' problem and so forth - are a consequence of the Unity of the Universe and the falsity of extreme metaphysical theories. This simple and easily-stated idea would explain all significant problems of philosophy at the level of principles. Whether it is the correct explanation cannot be decided in logic but until philosophers come up with a viable alternative it will remain demonstrably the best. Mysticism is mysterious, no doubt, and its philosophy might be a lifetime's work, but if we understand what is said in even in just this paragraph then we are in a position to judge for ourselves whether the doctrine of the Upanishads is philosophically plausible.

The truth of Nagarjuna's teachings would be an elegant and sufficient explanation for the confusion that afflicts metaphysicians who reject or do not know them. Priest, Melhuish and others interpret the absurdity of positive metaphysical theories as a proof that the Universe is paradoxical, Carnap as a proof it is meaningless, Russell as a proof there is no knowledge to be acquired in metaphysics but these appeals to incomprehensibility are useless and redundant. There can be no reasonable explanation for the failure of partial and extreme metaphysical theories other than their falsity and none has ever been proposed. If we assume that the falsity of extreme metaphysical positions is implied by their absurdity then our metaphysical calculations are complete and all that remains to be done is to search for a plausible interpretation of this global result. For this we have the literature and practices of the Perennial philosophy and in particular those of the Noble Nagarjuna.

It is not easy to explain why so few trained philosophers see mysticism as more than woolly nonsense and thus miss its importance. That positive or partial metaphysical theories fail in logic is the entire motivation for *dialethism*, *logical positivism*, *mysterianism*, *naturalistic dualism*, *objectivism* and other pessimistic views and what other reason for this could there be than that these theories are wrong and we are clever enough to be able to work this out? Philosophers in Russell's tradition fight tooth-and-nail and around-the-clock to deny the results of their own rational thinking but according to Nagarjuna there would be no need for all this work. All we would need do is trust our reason. It would be eminently reasonable to suppose that the absurdity of positive theories implies their falsity and the truth of the Perennial philosophy. If we concede this then by this single rational act we free ourselves once and for all from the Sisyphean drudgery of constantly defending demonstrably absurd metaphysical ideas while attacking others of equal absurdity in the sandpit of Kant's 'arena for mock fights'.

But again, what about the self? If 'my' self is non-existent then how can it function? For Nagarjuna existing things would be created, contingent, dependent and must be reduced for a fundamental

theory. This message seems to have been the main purpose of his extended logical demonstration. It forces his monks to normalise on a unique metaphysical view for which by reduction or for a fundamental analysis all functioning things are non-existent along with time and space. All *dhamma* or 'thing-events' would be reducible and not *really* real. The upper-case Self would be the source of all instances of lower-case selves and all Kantian phenomena including space-time. All would originate in the 'Being, Consciousness, Bliss' spoken of by the Upanishads, the permanent and unchangeable presence underlying everyday experience, the 'I Am' spoken of in Exodus 3:14, the goal towards which the teachings of Sri Ramana and the Buddha guide us, the medicine that cures all suffering, the Grail experience that legend tells us has the power to dissolve all distinctions and reveal immortality.

Leibnitz notes that a Unity has no parts. It is defined as free of all division and distinction. For Nagarjuna and the Perennial philosophy the Universe has no metaphysically real or fundamental parts. Reality would be *advaita* (not two). If there are no fundamental distinctions then are not two things. This term is a careful avoidance of the word 'One' for this might imply form and number. Both Dualism and Monism are rejected. Positive metaphysical positions fail because they deny *advaita* and Unity. When we ask 'Did the world arise from something or nothing?' we become confused because clearly it did not. When we ask 'Do we have freewill?' we become confused because neither of the obvious answers make sense. It is almost as if both answers must contain something of the truth. Nagarjuna explains that this confusion arises because we are rational thinkers and arrive at correct results. Armed with a knowledge of his work we may come to understand why our confusion arises or at least see a possible explanation.

A worry arises for logically-minded readers because characteristically 'mystical' statements such as Heraclitus's 'We are and are-not' may at first glance appear to be formal contradictions in ordinary logic. Where such contradictions seem to appear in the literature of mysticism this will be due to a misunderstanding of the rules of logic. A dialectical contradiction requires that one of the complementary pair A/not-A be true and the other false. This is stipulated by Aristotle. If we ignore his stipulation our logic will be incoherent and lead us to incorrect conclusions. By his use of language Heraclitus indicates that on their own the two atomic statements 'We are' and 'We are-not' would be unrigorous and in this sense false. Two falsities do not form a contradictory pair. Heraclitus' statement respects both Lao Tsu's rule for speaking rigorously and Aristotle's rules for the dialectic. For the dialectic we cannot simply assume there is 'no third option' but must establish this before we apply the laws. If we cannot establish this in logic then we must do so empirically or in experience. A failure to remember this might account for most of the confusion caused by the use of logic in mysticism and also for the reluctance of most self-professed 'rational' scholastic philosophers to consider a neutral theory. A doctrine that denies the truth of all positive statements about the world-as-a-whole obeys Aristotle's 'laws of thought' but transcends them, as must any theory that explains the origin of thought. There can be no true contradictions for a doctrine of Unity and this is a definition.

A further worry may arise if we follow some Western commentators and see Nagarjuna as employing some devious form of logic with which we are unfamiliar and so cannot be sure his result is trustworthy. In fact he employs Aristotelean logic with rigour. The complication is only that he refutes unsound views by the use of contradictory-pairs on more than one axis. For example, in the case of the question 'Did the world begin with Something or Nothing' he would refute both extremes of the pair '*this* or *that*' and then do the same for '*neither* or *both*' as a separate pair. That is to say, he refutes the conceptual distinctions necessary for the question to be asked in the first place. On each axis the two extreme answers offered by the question are shown not to form a legitimate contradictory pair for the dialectic. This is not a departure from Aristotle's logic but a careful and thorough application of it. Something/Nothing' and 'Exist/not-Exist' would not be cases of 'A/not-A' as defined by Aristotle and in this case the *tertium non datur* rule would not apply and there may be

other answers with no need to modify the 'laws of thought'. An analogy would be the question 'Does two plus two equal three or five'. Such questions are undecidable for not at all mystical reasons. The Perennial philosophy has no quarrel with logic or reason and its metaphysical claims are accessible to analysis by scholastic philosophers. It has a quarrel with philosophy only where logic and reason are abandoned.

As mere metaphysicians we can go no further. We are about to exit Plato's Academy. Once we concede with Kant the failure of all positive theories then our only way forward would be a study of the existential principle known as 'non-duality'. We must now get our feet wet even if it is only to paddle in the shallows. The Perennial philosophy is consistent with the results of logic as established by all philosophers who are able to think clearly but only begins in earnest where the determinedly scholastic tradition trails off into incomprehension and epistemological nihilism. If we cannot concede the plausibility of Nagarjuna's metaphysics then for us this is where philosophy ends. If we concede it then we are able to move on.

To be practical and useful a study of Nagarjuna would not require the attainment of anything like expertise. A decent commentary on Nagarjuna's proof and a little knowledge of Aristotle's dialectical method should suffice. This may be enough for the metaphysics of the Buddha and Lao Tsu. They would dismiss the immense complexity of academic philosophy as a consequence of wriggling-on-the-hook, the constant struggle necessary to avoid arriving at the conclusion that Reality is just as they say it is.

How should the amateur rational philosopher new to this area of knowledge proceed from here? On entering the 'Land of Woo' the first problem arising for the traveller is that of deciding who to trust, how to distinguish between authentic teachers and those who teach beyond their knowledge and abilities only to mislead and confuse. If we know metaphysics and Nagarjuna then we will be less prone to make mistakes in this regard. We will gravitate towards people who speak in riddles, paradoxes and contradictions but otherwise appear to be sane. We need only note that while an authentic teacher may never make a metaphysical mistake he or she may sometimes abandon rigour for the sake of being helpful.

At any rate, we are not immediately forced to become monks. It would only be necessary to study the local use of language and logic. An effective and well-signposted way forward would be a study of the Noble Nagarjuna and a quick study of Aristotle's rules for the dialectic. Two books which together cover much of the same ground as this essay may be recommended. The first is not directly relevant from cover-to-cover but the author gives a clear exposition of the method of dialectic logic and the proper use of contradictory-pairs. The second is a clear, authoritative, thoroughly-explained and relatively brief introduction to Nagarjuna and the non-dual metaphysics of the Perennial philosophy.

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